

# rhodesian history

The Journal of The Central Africa Historical Association

Volume 1

1970

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Printed in Rhodesia by Graphic Printers (Pvt.) Ltd., Salisbury, Rhodesia.

# RHODESIAN HISTORY

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*Edited by R. S. Roberts*

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# ASIANS IN RHODESIA AND KENYA: A COMPARATIVE POLITICAL HISTORY

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ASIANS IN RHODESIA form a small minority group which has been neglected consistently by all commentators. This neglect, at first sight, is justifiable. Rhodesian Asians have never possessed the economic or political power of the Asians in Kenya. An examination of the characteristics of Kenyan Asian association with Africans provides a scale of reference which can then be applied to Rhodesia. When Rhodesian Asian association with Africans is examined in terms of this scale, it becomes clear that they have an importance out of all proportion to their numbers and have played a role relatively more important in modern Rhodesian politics than Asians have played in modern Kenyan politics.

Four phases of association emerged in Kenya. The first one involved individuals only. It commenced in 1921, when M. A. Desai gave publicity to Kikuyu demands in the *East African Chronicle* and provided assistance to Harry Thuku.<sup>1</sup> It continued throughout the 1930s, when Isher Dass voiced Kikuyu views on the Carter Commission in 1934, assisted the Kamba over destocking in 1938 and expressed Kikuyu and Kavirondo opposition to the Order in Council defining the White Highlands in 1939,<sup>2</sup> the year in which Makhan Singh became involved in the Mombasa strike.<sup>3</sup>

The second phase was brief and characterized by association between community leaders. It opened in 1945 when sections of the African and Indian press opposed the introduction of the membership system in similar terms. It continued in 1946, when Africans participated in a meeting of the East African Indian National Congress at which approval was given to the original proposals concerning a Central Assembly for the East African High Commission contained in 'Colonial 191'. It closed with the formation of an Unofficial Members' Organization in the Kenya Legislative Council in 1948.<sup>4</sup>

The third phase opened in 1948 with the arrival of the Indian Government's Commissioner. He encouraged greater co-operation between local Indian and African leaders.<sup>5</sup> This bore fruit in 1950, when Asian and African Members of Legislative Council opposed the Glancy Commission's recommendations on registration.<sup>6</sup> The issue was unresolved when a joint

<sup>1</sup> G. Bennett, *Kenya. A Political History: The Colonial Period*, London, O.U.P., 1963, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-5, 92, 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93; G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau': Nationalism in Kenya*, New York, Praeger, 1966, pp. 184-5.

<sup>4</sup> Bennett, pp. 102, 103, 120.

<sup>5</sup> Rosberg and Nottingham, p. 267.

<sup>6</sup> Bennett, pp. 123-4.

meeting of the Kenya African Union and the East African Indian National Congress was held to counter European settler ambitions, a meeting which moved on to demand immediate independence for the East African territories.<sup>7</sup> The Indian Government did not hesitate to display its sympathy for African aspirations even after the Emergency was declared in October 1952. Oginga Odinga visited India as a guest of the Government in February 1953,<sup>8</sup> while Joseph Murumbi, acting Secretary of the Kenya African Union was received by Pandit Nehru in March 1953, two months before K. A. U. was proscribed.<sup>9</sup> Nehru was also careful to send his daughter, the present Prime Minister, to greet Kenyatta within ten days of his release in 1961.<sup>10</sup>

The fourth phase in Kenya involves the relative isolation of Asians from political life. It is difficult to identify when it commenced, as African co-operation with Asians was unwilling as early as 1946;<sup>11</sup> but Mboya has suggested that Asians were betrayed by their party leaders from 1955 onwards.<sup>12</sup> Certainly it is clear that, in the complex manoeuvres taking place from 1958 amongst Africans, Asians made the wrong responses; for example, the Kenya National Party initially did not recognize African primacy,<sup>13</sup> and Indian support for Ngala's administration<sup>14</sup> was suicidal.<sup>15</sup> Only the Kenya Freedom Party saved the day for Asians<sup>16</sup>; and all they secured was the privilege of joining the Kenya African National Union on recognizing the right of Africans to rule Kenya.<sup>17</sup>

The pattern which emerges in Kenya involves a long initial period of individual Asian co-operation with Africans, followed by a brief association between community leaders until the Indian Government stimulated closer co-operation in a third phase. The fourth phase was marked by the unwillingness of Asian leaders to run counter to the wishes of the Colonial Government, leaving co-operation on lines acceptable to African Nationalists in the hands of a very small group of young men who won little but individual respect.

A level of co-operation between Asians and Africans in Rhodesia matching that achieved in Kenya cannot be expected. Rhodesian Asians are the smallest minority racial group. In 1956, they numbered 5 127 persons compared to 8 079 Coloureds, 177 124 Europeans and an estimated 2 540 000 Africans<sup>18</sup>. Rhodesia's anomalous constitutional position, particularly from 1923, meant

<sup>7</sup> Rosberg and Nottingham, pp. 227-8.

<sup>8</sup> O. Odinga, *Not yet Uhuru*, London, Heinemann, 1967, pp. 127-8.

<sup>9</sup> Rosberg and Nottingham, pp. 308-10.

<sup>10</sup> J. Kenyatta, *Suffering without Bitterness*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1968, pp. 139, 145.

<sup>11</sup> Bennett, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> T. Mboya, *Freedom and After*, London, Deutsch, 1963, pp. 112-3.

<sup>13</sup> Odinga, pp. 156-61, 167-71.

<sup>14</sup> G. Bennett and C. G. Rosberg, *The Kenyatta Election: Kenya 1960-1961*, London, O.U.P., 1961, pp. 197-200.

<sup>15</sup> W. Itote, *Mau Mau General*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1967, p. 244.

<sup>16</sup> Mboya, p. 113.

<sup>17</sup> Kenyatta, p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> *Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland: Census of Population 1956*, Salisbury, Central Statistical Office, 1960 p. 3.

that the Government in Salisbury was not susceptible to pressure exercised by the Indian Government through Whitehall. The Rhodesian Legislative Assembly did not contain seats overtly reserved on racial grounds, and had no Asian members. These significant differences alone between Kenya and Rhodesia were bound to result in differences in the part Rhodesian Asians could play.

Further differences stem from the lack of cohesion amongst Asians. In 1956, only 3 274 had been born in Rhodesia.<sup>19</sup> There were 2 466 Hindus, 1 607 Muslims, 915 Christians, predominantly Roman Catholic, 78 others, 53 Confucians and 8 Sikhs.<sup>20</sup> Of these, 3 889 Asians were Rhodesian citizens, the balance being made up by 456 Indian, 28 Pakistani and 488 other Commonwealth citizens and 225 aliens.<sup>21</sup> Differences in birthplace, religion and citizenship imposed restraints on Asian political activity which must be taken into account. In addition, while 2 754 males were resident in 1956, those between 20 and 64 years of age were only 1 218, few of whom could be expected to be interested in active co-operation with Africans.<sup>22</sup>

Against this background, the neglect of Rhodesian Asian activity is comprehensible. Leys noted that they were ignored but devoted only ten lines to them.<sup>23</sup> Ranger<sup>24</sup> and Rayner<sup>25</sup> make no reference to them; and other authors have only the briefest comments.<sup>26</sup> Keatley mentions only the manner in which Coloured people are associated legally with Asians and the participation of an Asian leader in the swimming pool furore of 1961-2.<sup>27</sup> Bull refers merely to European hostility to Asians as well as Africans over the land issue in 1921;<sup>28</sup> and, while Gray and Mason comment more frequently, their references are passing ones.<sup>29</sup>

African authors have also neglected Rhodesian Asians. Mtshali notes their participation in the 1961 Constitutional Conference.<sup>30</sup> Sithole comments on Asians' medial economic position, but then mentions them as African residents only when writing about the future of human relations;<sup>31</sup> and

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66. An examination of Asian immigration is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63. An additional forty-one did not state citizenship.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>23</sup> C. Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, pp. 268-9.

<sup>24</sup> T. O. Ranger, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, London, Fabian Commonwealth Bureau, 1960; 'African politics in twentieth-century Southern Rhodesia', in *Aspects of Central African History*, ed. T. O. Ranger. London, Heinemann, 1968, pp. 210-45.

<sup>25</sup> W. Rayner, *The Tribe and its Successors*, New York, Praeger, 1962.

<sup>26</sup> R. C. Haw, *No Other Home: Co-existence in Africa*, 2nd edit., Bulawayo, Stuart Manning, 1961, pp. 122-3. T. R. M. Creighton, *The Anatomy of Partnership*, London, Faber, 1960 pp. 138, 196.

<sup>27</sup> P. Keatley, *The Politics of Partnership*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963, pp. 259, 377.

<sup>28</sup> T. Bull, *Rhodesia: Crisis of Colour*, Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1968, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> R. Gray, *The Two Nations*, London, O.U.P., 1960; P. Mason, *Year of Decision*, London, O.U.P., 1960.

<sup>30</sup> B. V. Mtshali, *Rhodesia: Background to Conflict*, New York, Hawthorn Books, 1967, p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> N. Sithole, *African Nationalism*, Cape Town, O.U.P., 1962, pp. 38, 172. Asians are not regarded as having a home in Africa, *ibid.*, p. 19.

Shamuyarira adopts a similar position.<sup>32</sup> There is in fact greater interest in Asia than in resident Asians.<sup>33</sup>

Only the Dotsons have written specifically on Indians—but as Indians. They make only passing references to Indian political association with Africans and then mainly in Zambia and Malawi.<sup>34</sup> As they accept the legality of the unilateral declaration of independence in Rhodesia, their conclusions regarding post-U.D.I. Indian attitudes must be treated with caution.<sup>35</sup>

The first phase of Rhodesian Asian co-operation with Africans was limited and brief. Messrs. Bhulabhai and Company had a stand in Sinoia where they operated a depository and a stand in Salisbury itself where they engaged in general dealing and importing in 1937; the company shared its Salisbury stand with the Native Agricultural Society, also licensed for general dealing.<sup>36</sup> The possibility of such co-operation declined as the Land Apportionment Act was tightened; it was reduced by the Land Apportionment Act of 1941, and was restricted further by the Land Apportionment Amendment Act of 1945.<sup>37</sup> It was rendered impossible when Native Urban Areas were established; by the proclamation of two such areas in Salisbury in January 1947, an African might lease, use or occupy land only in a Native Urban Area.<sup>38</sup>

The isolation of the urban African from contact with other racial groups, other than on an employer-employee or seller-purchaser basis, was one factor which rendered impossible any second phase of Rhodesian Asian co-operation with Africans comparable to the second Kenyan phase. The allegedly non-racial character of the Legislative Assembly contributed to the same end, as did the monopolistic nature of the Press, dominated by the *Argus Press*<sup>39</sup> and African Newspapers Limited.<sup>40</sup>

The second Rhodesian phase commenced with the inauguration of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The election of Rhodesian African members of the Federal Assembly, albeit by an overwhelmingly white electorate,<sup>41</sup> meant that legal obstacles to interracial association had to be relaxed. The first small step was taken late in 1954 when the Land Apportionment Act was amended to permit a multiracial university and to allow, under strict control, the formation of any association 'having as its object the promotion of good race relations'. Multiracial activity for cultural, welfare or religious purposes on premises, or any stand, or land, suitably

<sup>32</sup> N. M. Shamuyarira, *Crisis in Rhodesia*, London, Deutsch, 1965, pp. 106, 121, 239.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 190, 198-9; Sithole, pp. 20-1, 162.

<sup>34</sup> F. and D. Dotson, *The Indian Minority of Zambia, Rhodesia and Malawi*, New Haven, Yale U.P., 1968, pp. 298-340.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xi, 351-2.

<sup>36</sup> *Southern Rhodesia Government Gazette*, 30.iv.1937, Notice No. 276.

<sup>37</sup> No. 11 of 1941, sections 26, 27, 36-9, 41, 43, 44; No. 14 of 1945, section 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Southern Rhodesia Government Gazette*, 10.i.1947, Proclamations Nos. 2, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Leys, p. 89.

<sup>40</sup> Shamuyarira, pp. 16-17, 136-41.

<sup>41</sup> *Southern Rhodesia, Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs, Chief Native Commissioner and Director of Native Development for the Year 1953*, Salisbury, Government Printer, 1954, CSR 27, p. 1.

zoned in terms of the Town and Country Planning Act, in any local authority area,<sup>42</sup> now became possible for Africans, provided they could find Asians, Coloureds or Europeans prepared to associate with them.

The anomalous constitutional position enjoyed by Rhodesia was inherited by the Federation in respect of the Commonwealth. The Federation contained 3 525 Indian and 166 Pakistani citizens in 1956; and Indian and Pakistani diplomatic representatives were accredited to the Federal Government in Salisbury. The Pakistani representative could have little impact through the twenty-eight Pakistanis in Rhodesia but, by proposing to send his son to a European school, he soon provoked a local controversy which questioned the validity of Partnership.<sup>45</sup>

The Indian representative had greater opportunity, and exerted influence in two directions. Firstly, a pamphlet he disseminated on 'Self-Determination' triggered the establishment in Salisbury in 1955 of the City Youth League,<sup>46</sup> from which the revived Southern Rhodesian African National Congress emerged under Joshua Nkomo.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, he educated the Indian population in the Federation as a whole on the legitimate national aspirations of colonial peoples.<sup>48</sup> One method employed was to renew cultural contacts with India.<sup>49</sup>

Rhodesian Asians responded to the relaxation in the law and to this local diplomatic activity. The Bulawayo Hindoo Society made a gift of blankets, clothing and food to the African Society for the Physically Defective.<sup>50</sup> The Salisbury Hindoo Society contributed to the University College Fund.<sup>51</sup> The Federation of Asian Associations committed itself to a donation of £4 000 to the Nyadzima College, intended to provide industrial and technical education for Africans.<sup>52</sup> It is significant that these contributions were made after the arrival of Asian diplomatic representatives but before any effective African political force existed.

The announcement of the large donation to Nyadzima College may have been made in response to a speech delivered at Livingstone by Lord Malvern as Federal Prime Minister. The Inter-Territorial Movement of Persons (Control) Act of 1954 had already provoked Asians by showing that Rhodesia would restrict their entry from across the Zambezi.<sup>53</sup> Malvern's statement that his Government had no intention of permitting Indian or Asian immigration, at least until Africans were sufficiently advanced, revealed that the Federal Government was as opposed to Asians as the Territorial Government. His view was not only endorsed but was carried further by *The Rhodesia Herald*, which held that there was room only for 'people imbued

<sup>42</sup> Land Apportionment Amendment Act, No. 51 of 1954, sections 5, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Sir Roy Welensky, *4000 Days*, London, Collins, 1964 pp. 78-9.

<sup>44</sup> *Federation . . . Census of Population 1956*, p. 63.

<sup>45</sup> *The Rhodesia Herald*, 6.ii.1956.

<sup>47</sup> Ranger, 'African politics', pp. 238-9.

<sup>48</sup> *Midlands Observer*, 4.xi.1955.

<sup>51</sup> *The Rhodesia Herald*, 30.v.1956.

<sup>53</sup> No. 36 of 1954; Mason, pp. 58-9.

<sup>46</sup> Shamyarira, pp. 26-8.

<sup>48</sup> Dotson and Dotson, p. 323.

<sup>50</sup> *The Chronicle*, 10.ii.1956.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.vii.1956.



with the ideals of Western Civilization'.<sup>54</sup> The Federal and Territorial Governments, and the European Press, were combining to push Asians down paths, along which Asian diplomatic representatives were trying to draw them already, in support of African Nationalism.

The extent of Rhodesian Asian support is difficult to gauge. Bull indicates that all Nationalist parties have enjoyed multiracial support, particularly the later ones.<sup>55</sup> Shamuyarira mentions only 100 white members of the African National Congress.<sup>56</sup> What is clear is that Asians supported the National Democratic Party, the A.N.C.'s successor. The N.D.P. National Congress early in 1961 was held in Bulawayo at the Vashee Hall,<sup>57</sup> a building erected, owned and operated by the Bulawayo Hindoo Society.<sup>58</sup> S. N. Mehta of the Asian Society was involved in the Salisbury swimming pool case, the judgment in which was handed down on 13 October 1961.<sup>59</sup> At this time, Mehta was involved, as an Asian leader rather than as a result of his N.D.P. connections, in plans for multiracial, private political talks in which the N.D.P. was itself strongly interested.<sup>60</sup>

The high point of Asian political association with Africans appears to have been reached in 1961. The banning of the N.D.P. in December 1961, and the increasingly violent political confrontation which has developed have led to Asian isolation. In this third Rhodesian phase, Shamuyarira holds Asians are identifying increasingly with the African people,<sup>61</sup> while the Dotsons suggest that Indians are in favour of the present government.<sup>62</sup> These commentators agree only on the detention of a small number of young Asians, who may represent the Rhodesian equivalent of the Kenya Freedom Party.

African reservations about Asians in Kenya are repeated in Rhodesia. B. J. Mnyanda has drawn attention to their privileged position even in death.<sup>63</sup> Sithole refers to their privileged economic position; and Shamuyarira notes their superior wages, the higher prices in their stores and their educational privileges.<sup>64</sup> Dislike of local Asians is apparent, but it is balanced by a recognition of the debt owed to Asia. Sithole stresses India's opposition to European imperialism in Africa.<sup>65</sup> Shamuyarira confirms the hints given to the Dotsons in 1959, which they discounted, by acknowledging the financial aid received from independent Asian states after the 1958 Accra Conference; and he also emphasises the political support provided by India at the United Nations in June, 1962.<sup>66</sup>

Rhodesian African dislike of local Asians may be matched by Rhodesian

<sup>54</sup> *The Rhodesia Herald*, 1.v.1956.

<sup>55</sup> Shamuyarira, p. 50.

<sup>56</sup> I am grateful to the Town Clerk of Bulawayo for these details.

<sup>57</sup> Keatley, p. 377; *Evening Standard*, 13.x.1961.

<sup>58</sup> Information from a participant, Salisbury, 25.x.1961.

<sup>59</sup> Shamuyarira, p. 239.

<sup>60</sup> Dotson and Dotson, pp. 351-2.

<sup>61</sup> B. J. Mnyanda, *In Search of Truth*, Bombay, Hind Kitabs, (1954), p. 39.

<sup>62</sup> Sithole, p. 39; Shamuyarira, pp. 106, 121, 125.

<sup>63</sup> Sithole, pp. 21, 162.

<sup>64</sup> Shamuyarira, pp. 53, 198-9; Dotson and Dotson, pp. XI, 324.

<sup>55</sup> Bull, pp. 128-9.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

Asian dislike of local Africans. An Indian visitor to Rhodesia, writing in 1942 and presumably reflecting Rhodesian Asian views current during his stay, disparaged the African's ability to perform any but the simplest tasks.<sup>67</sup> His opinions are similar to those of many Europeans, who have implied that Africans are adolescent or primitive.<sup>68</sup> Evidence presented by the Dotsons suggests that this similarity between Rhodesian Asian and European opinions continues.<sup>69</sup> The Kenyan pattern is repeated once more, for Yash Tandon holds that Asians there were reserved in private towards African aspirations.<sup>70</sup>

Asian co-operation with Africans in Kenya passed through four phases, the second of which could not be repeated in Rhodesia. The first phase of individual co-operation in Kenya developed also in Rhodesia, where it was nipped in the bud by legal action. This contributed towards rendering the second Kenyan phase, one of co-operation between leaders responding to local stimuli, impossible in Rhodesia. The third Kenyan phase of co-operation in response to Indian Government action arose in Rhodesia after Federation. The fourth Kenyan phase of participation by Asian radicals and non-participation by the mass of Asians occurred in Rhodesia as its third phase after 1961. The doubts about local Asians voiced by leading Kenyans were more marked among leading Rhodesian Africans, while private Asian attitudes in Kenya and Rhodesia towards Africans were reserved or hostile.

The similarities are strong; but what of the dissimilarities? Tandon has questioned the value of Asian activity in Kenya.<sup>71</sup> How valuable has the Rhodesian Asian contribution to local African political development been?

Rhodesian Asian numbers between 1953 and 1962 were too small for them to consider leading any multiracial group. As a result, they avoided the pitfall which trapped the leadership of the Indian National Congress in Kenya. In this important formative period, Rhodesian Asians performed three services for African Nationalism. They provided the excuse for the Indian Government to establish a diplomatic post through which to stimulate and assist African Nationalist movements. They supported development and welfare projects among Africans before an effective African Nationalist movement had been created. They aided and facilitated the growth of African political movements until these were able to stand on their own feet with external African help.<sup>72</sup>

Rhodesian Asian co-operation has been important to African Nationalists. It provided a means to circumvent some European-controlled Local Authority supervision in the urban areas, and it facilitated relations with the Indian

<sup>67</sup> A. S. N. Wadia, *The Romance of Rhodesia*, London, Dent, 1947, pp. XIV, 75.

<sup>68</sup> S. Kane, *The World's View*, London, Cassell, 1954, p. 249; W. D. Gale, *Heritage of Rhodes*, Cape Town, O.U.P., 1950, pp. 127-8.

<sup>69</sup> Dotson and Dotson, p. 352.

<sup>70</sup> Y. Tandon, 'A political survey', in *Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa*, ed. D. P. Ghai, Nairobi, O.U.P., 1965, 77.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Mboya, p. 129; *Tanganyika Standard*, 7.ix.1962.

Government. These factors contributed to the emphasis placed on multi-racial membership by Rhodesian African Nationalists from the foundation of the A.N.C. onwards, in contradistinction to the Kenya African National Union until 1962.

It is clear that Rhodesian Asians have played a more important role than Kenyan Asians in the emergence of local African Nationalism. In both instances, the numbers involved actively have been proportionately small, and it is likely that the average Rhodesian Asian has been as apathetic to African political success as his counterpart in Kenya, for such success in either country could involve only a change in political masters for Asians.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Tandon, 70, 72.

# THE RHODESIAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS

The Quarterly Journal of the Rhodesian Economics Society

*Volume Six, Number One*

*March, 1972*

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